

Agriculture, Commodity Futures Trading Commission and Farm Credit Administration.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, May 12, 1998, at 2:00 p.m. to hold a hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate to conduct a hearing on Tuesday, May 12, 1998 at 9:30 a.m. on Indian gaming, focusing on lands taken into trust for purposes of gaming. The hearing will be held in room 106 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, May 12, 1998 at 10:30 a.m. in room 226 of the Senate Dirksen Office Building to hold a hearing on "Raising Tobacco Prices: the Consequences."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

A CRITICAL TIME IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

• Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, as a long-time strong supporter of Israel and her security, and a fierce advocate of the Middle East peace process, I want to commend President Clinton, Secretary Albright, Ambassador Ross and Assistant Secretary Indyk for their ongoing efforts to preserve, and even reinvigorate, the stalled peace process. I was encouraged to read this morning that President Clinton has asked Secretary Albright to forgo the G-7 meeting in Germany in order to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu while he is here this week in the United States.

While they have come under fire recently, as a Member of the Foreign Relations Committee who has for years followed closely the peace process, I believe they should be supported in their efforts to help forge a just and lasting peace for the region by helping the parties to move forward urgently on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

About a month ago 81 Senators joined in a letter to President Clinton expressing concern about the Administration's ideas for the next phase of re-

deployment being made public, about certain of Israel's security concerns, and about final status talks. I did not sign that letter, in part because I believe the Administration should be commended, not criticized, for sticking with this process at a critical time, and for its willingness to press for Israel's legitimate security concerns while recognizing the legitimate claims of the Palestinians.

I have watched with growing concern over the past week or so as some critics of the Administration's policy toward Israel here in Congress have launched fierce, often partisan, attacks on that policy. The Speaker, late last week, was even quoted as saying, in a press conference in which he criticized the Administration's recent handling of the peace process, that "America's strong-arm tactics would send a clear signal to the supporters of terrorism that their murderous actions are an effective tool in forcing concessions from Israel."

That is, simply put, Mr. President, a scandalous and demagogic accusation to level at the President, who has been engaged for over a year, along with his senior foreign policy advisors, in a vigorous effort to bring the two sides together at a critical time in the peace process, and to help bridge the gaps that exist between them by offering constructive, creative ideas for each to consider. I understand that this proposal was crafted over many months, and was designed to address many of the Israeli government's most pressing security concerns and to meet many of its criteria for evaluating real progress on these issues.

The President has repeatedly made clear that he is not trying to impose a solution on the parties, nor could he. And that he is not issuing ultimatums to anyone—as further evidenced by his willingness to have Secretary Albright reach out again to Mr. Netanyahu this week. After months of on-and-off negotiations, with U.S. envoys shuttling back and forth among the parties, the major points of disagreement have become clear, and President Clinton is now simply offering ideas for them to consider—an approach consistent with America's role at virtually every other critical point in the Middle East peace process over the years. At Camp David, in Madrid, and at subsequent major negotiations, American attempts to bridge the gaps between the parties have played a critical role in reaching final agreement. I have talked with senior American officials involved in the discussions, and remain hopeful that a final agreement will soon be reached. The parties must not miss this key opportunity to move forward in the peace process.

Over the weekend Mr. Netanyahu rejected the Administration's offer, which Mr. Arafat had accepted, to come to Washington this week for a summit to agree on terms for a further withdrawal from the West Bank, and to agree to accelerate final status talks

provided for in the Oslo Agreement. I understand from news reports that alternative proposals are now being considered by the Israeli government for a 13 percent withdrawal which could happen in two stages—a substantial withdrawal immediately, followed by an additional 2-4 percent withdrawal once Mr. Arafat makes good on certain tough new security commitments he has reportedly agreed to make as a part of the overall agreement.

I understand these new arrangements include the kind of strong new Palestinian commitments to fight terrorism which the Israeli government has long been seeking, strengthening the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding negotiated at the end of last year, and providing for a test period before this phase of withdrawal is completed. That is a major victory for Israel, and should help to address legitimate Israeli concerns about the Palestinian Authority's commitment to fighting terrorism.

Now I am not an expert, and I acknowledge that I do not know all the details of the various land parcels that are being discussed. But it is clear that on the issue of land, some progress is possible. Let us not forget that the Palestinians had originally sought a 30 percent withdrawal from the West Bank, as the first in a 3-phase withdrawal to which Israel agreed—though the timing and extent of each withdrawal were not explicitly established. So the Palestinians had sought a 30 percent withdrawal, the Israelis offered just under ten percent, and the Administration has been pressing for a compromise of 13 percent. Mr. Netanyahu has reportedly now privately agreed to a withdrawal of about 11 percent.

I understand that Mr. Arafat has also agreed, as a condition for attending a Washington summit meeting with President Clinton and Mr. Arafat, to allow the next redeployment to be considered alongside final status talks, by a joint Palestinian-Israeli Committee, operating on a parallel track. The American proposal also reportedly contemplates greater flexibility on the Oslo timetable, which had been set to conclude by May 4, 1999. Each of these changes would be significant achievements for Israeli negotiators.

Let me make four points about this situation, Mr. President. First, despite all of the recent (frequently partisan) criticism of the Administration, recent polls both here and in Israel show substantial support for further progress in the peace process. And this includes polls of Jewish Americans, of which I am proud to be one. Indeed, I read about a poll last week which noted that a substantial majority of Jewish Americans polled agreed that the U.S. in this process was doing just what we should be doing—offering ideas, facilitating discussions, working with the parties on alternative formulations which could meet all of their legitimate security and other interests.